

President's Aide Says:

K. Meant to Scuttle Ike's USSR Visit

By Marie Smith

A WHITE HOUSE AIDE said yesterday in a speech preview of what President Eisenhower may discuss in his television address to the Nation tonight, that the identity and mission of the U-2 spy plane downed on May Day in Russia were not immediately admitted to give the pilot a chance to escape.

Robert E. Merriam, deputy assistant to the President, intimated that Eisenhower will elaborate tonight also on the fact that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev went to the Summit determined to scuttle not only the conference but the President's planned trip to Russia next month.

"There were some indications before the U-2 incident that the Russians were having second thoughts about the trip," Merriam said in a luncheon talk before the ladies of the Capitol Hill (Republican) Club.

He did not disclose any of the indications but pointed out that on his trip to the Soviet Union last summer, Vice President Richard M. Nixon—"who is not yet President..." got a reception that "really had the Russians bothered."

Of the spy plane incident, Merriam said the pilot was under instructions, if he got to earth safely, to try to escape and he had elaborate equipment to help him get out of Russia.

THE STORY that came out on May 5 that the plane was on a weather reconnaissance was designed to help the pilot get out of the country if he were still alive and if possible conceal the nature of the mission, Merriam said. He did not say who made the decision to follow that strategy.

However, after analyzing Khrushchev's announcement on May 7 that the pilot was alive and the plane captured

substantially intact, Merriam said "it became clear that he had the facts, that the pilot was a prisoner and had told his mission."

"At that time our Government was faced with the problem of stating the facts as they existed or have some additional stories that could not be sustained. Secretary Herter decided to state the story in complete essence," Merriam added.

He repeated the now well known fact that the flights over Soviet territory began four years ago and continued until May Day.

Some people ask why, with the Summit meeting coming up, the flights should not have been discontinued, Merriam said, then answered with a question: "Should we drop our guard because negotiations are under way?"

MERRIAM recalled that negotiations were under way at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

He said that Khrushchev apparently decided to scuttle the Summit conference because he had decided they were not going to get the kind of concessions they had hoped to obtain, and used the spy plane incident as the method.

IN HIS SPEECH Merriam stressed that this country's foreign policy is built on a "deterrent force of such incredible capacity that no enemy, in the opinion of those who have studied the situation, will ever dare attack us."

Merriam appeared as the club's "mystery guest" and was substituting for Gen. Jerry Persons, President Eisenhower's top assistant. He was introduced by Mrs. William Culbertson, luncheon chairman, who introduced Mrs. Everett Dirksen and Mrs. Norman Brunsdale as special guests.